

# Michelle Obama ready to fight to stop changes in healthy school-lunch law

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First lady Michelle Obama speaks to school leaders and experts about school nutrition, in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex in Washington. A House committee has endorsed a GOP plan to allow some schools to opt out of healthier school meal standards. Photo: AP/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, File

WASHINGTON — Michelle Obama has stayed out of most messy political battles. But on Tuesday the first lady jumped right in.

She publicly took on lawmakers, food companies and lunch ladies. They oppose the [school lunch law](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=school+lunch) ([https://www.newsela.com/?tag=school lunch](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=school+lunch)) she championed nearly four years ago. They say it's leading kids to bring lunch from home.

The attempt to ease up on new nutrition rules for school lunches is unacceptable, Obama said. She delivered the remarks at a meeting with school nutrition officials. It was the beginning of her public push to defend the law.

The first lady slammed lawmakers for playing “politics with our kids’ health.” She suggested they were trying to “roll back everything we have worked for.”

## **"Unacceptable To Me"**

"It's unacceptable to me not just as first lady, but also as a mother," she said.

The tough remarks were new for the first lady. She has mostly tried to work with the food companies. She prefers not to go through Congress in her drive against childhood obesity. [Obesity \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity) means being very overweight. It can lead to diabetes and other health problems.

Obama is the nation's best-known healthy-eating supporter. She has mostly gone for partnerships and promises from the food companies. She's been aiming for slow changes in their products.

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 set new rules for school food. Obama lobbied to get it passed. But since then she has rarely gotten into arguments about the law. The law set rules for the amount of salt in school lunches and breakfasts. It added targets for more whole grains and fresh fruit.

But the law is being challenged in Congress. The School Nutrition Association is a coalition of school officials and the food companies that sell mini-pizzas and chicken nuggets to schools. Its members include Pizza Hut, Coca-Cola, Chobani Greek yogurt and Tyson Food Service. The group wants the law gone.

The group supported the law in 2010. But its leaders now say the rules are too harsh.

## **Bringing Lunch From Home**

House Republicans have backed the group's efforts. A House committee is about to vote Thursday for a way out. It is proposing a way to allow school districts that have been operating at a loss to get a one-year break from the nutrition guidelines.

The break is only aimed at certain schools. Some have seen money become a problem. In these districts, more students are bringing lunch from home instead of buying school lunches. Some schools say they have had trouble finding products they can afford which meet the nutrition standards. Meanwhile, they've watched students throw away large amounts of the healthy food.

"These new federal regulations should not drive local school nutrition programs underwater. This temporary one-year waiver simply throws them a lifeline," said Brian Rell. He is a spokesman for Rep. Robert B. Aderholt, a Republican from Alabama. Aderholt is the chairman of the agriculture subcommittee, which approved the exemption in a vote last week.

Supporters of the break described it as a modest attempt to add flexibility to the program. They said the first lady's response seemed too harsh.

## **Fruits And Veggies Or Pizza?**

But the White House has appeared eager to play tough. They want to protect a key piece of what the first lady has accomplished. White House officials helped with a letter by ex-presidents of the School Nutrition Association opposing the exemption plan.

The group is also seeking other changes to the law. It wants to get rid of a rule that foods be all whole-grain by July 2014. Instead, it wants to stick with the current target of half. The group also wants to hold to the new rule for salt rather than a lower target scheduled to go into effect in a few years. It also wants to end the rule that students have to take a fruit or vegetable, even if they don't plan to eat it.

"What we're not going to do is put politics and interests ahead of what's good for our kids," said Sam Kass. He doesn't want to "allow politicians to set nutrition standards."

Kass runs the first lady's anti-obesity campaign. He is also the White House chef.

On Tuesday, David Binkle joined the first lady for the event. Binkle runs food services for the Los Angeles Unified School District. He said that he was a member of the School Nutrition Association. But he said its "hard line" on the law did not reflect his views.

"In fact, we don't serve the typical corn dog and chicken nuggets," he said. "We don't even have pizza on the menu."

## Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section “Fruits And Veggies Or Pizza?” that explains what those trying to change the law want to accomplish.
- 2 Which selection from the article BEST explains the first lady’s interest in school lunch nutrition?
  - (A) They want to protect a key piece of what the first lady has accomplished. White House officials helped with a letter by ex-presidents of the School Nutrition Association opposing the exemption plan.
  - (B) She prefers not to go through Congress in her drive against childhood obesity. Obesity means being very overweight. It can lead to diabetes and other health problems.
  - (C) Michelle Obama has stayed out of most messy political battles. But on Tuesday the first lady jumped right in.
  - (D) The first lady slammed lawmakers for playing “politics with our kids’ health.” She suggested they were trying to “roll back everything we have worked for.”
- 3 Read the sentence from the article.

*Some schools say they have had trouble finding products they can afford which meet the nutrition standards.*

Which sentence gives a hint to the meaning of “standards”?

- (A) The attempt to ease up on new nutrition rules for school lunches is unacceptable, Obama said.
- (B) The School Nutrition Association is a coalition of school officials and the food companies that sell mini-pizzas and chicken nuggets to schools.
- (C) White House officials helped with a letter by ex-presidents of the School Nutrition Association opposing the exemption plan.
- (D) “What we’re not going to do is put politics and interests ahead of what’s good for our kids,” said Sam Kass.

- 4 Read the sentence from the article.

*But since then she has rarely gotten into arguments about the law.*

Select the word that would MOST change the meaning of the sentence if it were to replace “arguments.”

- (A) quarrels
- (B) fights
- (C) disagreements
- (D) discussions

## Answer Key

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section “Fruits And Veggies Or Pizza?” that explains what those trying to change the law want to accomplish.

**Paragraph 15:**

**The group is also seeking other changes to the law. It wants to get rid of a rule that foods be all whole-grain by July 2014. Instead, it wants to stick with the current target of half. The group also wants to hold to the new rule for salt rather than a lower target scheduled to go into effect in a few years. It also wants to end the rule that students have to take a fruit or vegetable, even if they don't plan to eat it.**

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